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# **Scrutiny Review of the Council Website**

**March 2005**

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## **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Review of the Council Website was set up to consider the Council's response to the e-government agenda and to examine how Haringey intends to build an enabling Council using information communication technology. The Review focused on the website's content and usability and specifically, how councillors, residents, community partners and suppliers could work better and smarter through a facilitative and transactional website. It examined how the website can be used for enhancing local democracy and democratic services and become a more transactional website for local people.
- 1.2 The Review received evidence from the Executive Member for Community Involvement, the Executive Member for Organisational Development & Performance and from senior council officers from the IT and Communication Unit. We considered the content of the Website Development Plan, the Website Application Plan and a summary of the Customer Services Strategy.
- 1.3 This was a mini review and set out to examine only few key areas. A summary of the recommendations is given below and is based around three key themes: Website Development; Local Democracy (e-democracy) and Consultation and Community Involvement. Further details and explanation of the recommendations are outlined in the body of the report.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Website Development**

##### **Promoting the website**

###### **Recommendation 1**

That the web site address ([www.haringey.gov.uk](http://www.haringey.gov.uk)) be used on all council communications and advertisements including signage and council vans.

###### **Recommendation 2**

That the Council's public access computer sites, e.g. libraries, should be configured to ensure defaults to Haringey website homepage. This would raise awareness of the website and encourage greater usage.

##### **Links to external websites**

###### **Recommendation 3**

That links to the websites of local community/voluntary sector organisations be added to the relevant service/information pages of the website. This should include a disclaimer, as is the current practise about information on other sites

##### **Roles & Responsibilities**

###### **Recommendation 4**

That all the Directorates allocate responsibility to specific post(s) for management of content development on the website, or identify additional resources to create a Web Content Management Officer(s) post in their directorate.

### **Recommendation 5**

That web publishers be encouraged to take up training on the use of plain English/writing for the website to ensure that a consistent standard in writing is maintained throughout the website.

### **Content Development**

#### **Recommendation 6**

That information such as interactive tours/games which are both entertaining and informative/educational be added to the website. For example a virtual tour of Bruce Castle, Alexandra Place or other key sites in the borough.

#### **Recommendation 7**

That a section on 'Are you new to Haringey' be developed to include maps and directions on how to get to key service centres such as libraries, one-stop shops, civic centre, hospitals, schools etc. The council website should aim to be the portal for Haringey.

#### **Recommendation 8**

That the website pages on crime be enhanced to detail news of any particular spate of crime and community safety initiatives. A high profile link from the homepage to the crime page should be added.

#### **Recommendation 9**

That the search engine be adapted so that the most important information is listed first. For instance it should pick up all applications including web pages and attached files, to facilitate easy problem reporting, by creating a direct link by typing the appropriate key word, e.g. 'rubbish collection'.

#### **Recommendation 10**

The new Childrens Service should be encouraged to make maximum use of the website to strengthen communication with their client groups and to build an integrated service.

#### **Recommendation 11**

The LEA should work with governing bodies and headteachers to ensure that one system is used so that all schools are supported to develop a website and secondly that all schools in Haringey follow a standardised web name format as described above.

### **Local Democracy (e-democracy)**

### **Content Development**

### **Recommendation 12**

That a youth 'page' on the council website be developed specifically aimed at young people, to include a 'fun' element (quizzes, links to external websites) and educational content on local democracy and what the council does. In addition, a link should be set to the youth page from the homepage of the website.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the link to local democracy on the homepage of the website called 'Council' be renamed to 'Council and local democracy'.

### **Recommendation 14**

That a post code search facility be developed to enable the public to identify their ward councillors contact details and to identify their ward and constituency. This should be linked to other relevant sections including the section on 'Are you new to Haringey'.

### **Recommendation 15**

That the web page providing links to profiles of all elected councillors be displayed to enable searches via the following options:

- An alphabetical list of all councillors;
- By ward;
- By Executive position;
- By membership of Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- Area Assemblies;
- And by political groups.

In addition the profiles of individual councillors should be further developed to include easy to view information on position in the council, appointments to outside bodies, ward events, and register of interests. It is noted that the ODPM's Priority Service Outcomes states that councillors are to be given the option of their own web page (appendix 2, R6). This review supports the rollout of this by December 2005. Councillors should be consulted on design, layout and content.

### **Recommendation 16**

That publication of council agendas, minutes and reports on the website for all public meetings be set out in a clear and accessible form. This should include full council papers, executive papers and agendas and other formally constituted council bodies. For public meetings reports should be published on the website within the legal deadline of publication of council agendas. The council should publish historical reports going back to the establishment of the new constitution following the Local Government Act 2000.

### **Recommendation 17**

That the profile and contents of Area Assemblies and Housing Forums on the website be enhanced to encourage greater involvement in local decision making. This should include an element of interactivity.

### **Recommendation 18**

That following recommendations made in the Scrutiny Review on Decision Making the council should develop an online corporate calendar, which would combine all council events from meetings through to festivals and openings.

## **Monitoring**

### **Recommendation 19**

That visitor numbers to the local democracy pages be recorded and monitored to enable the business unit to target increased use of the website to access local democratic services.

## **Consultation & Community Involvement**

### **Content Development**

#### **Recommendation 20**

That a high profile link to council consultation be introduced to enable residents to use the website to access all current consultation processes online.

#### **Recommendation 21**

That an annual consultation calendar linked to the Forward Plan be published on the website and updated regularly.

#### **Recommendation 22**

That a system be developed for quick voting online on topics of interest. A quick vote system will enable the council to consult residents on simple policy and service related matters.

### **Consultation**

#### **Recommendation 23**

That an ongoing online feedback system be developed to continually review the content and structure of the website to ensure it remains relevant to local residents needs.

#### **Recommendation 24**

That a full consultation on the development of the website be conducted to seek user views on suggestions for improvements. This should seek to capture the views of a wide cross section of the community.

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The massive advance in communication technology in recent decades has touched upon almost every aspect of the way in which we conduct our working and home lives. Innovations in the television, telephone and computer industries have meant that citizens can now choose from a range of communication forms which make interaction, especially over long distances, speedier, easier, more accessible and reliable.
- 2.2 Local Authorities need to make use of these new forms of communication to engage with local residents and other stakeholders. This Scrutiny Review was established to consider Haringey Council's response to the electronic government agenda and to examine how Haringey intends to build an enabling Council using information communication technology. This was a task and finish Review which focused on three key issues which included the website's content and usability, how the website can be used for enhancing local democracy and democratic services and the website development and application plans.

### **2.3 Membership of the Review**

Cllr Takki Sulaiman (Chair)  
Cllr Gideon Bull  
Cllr Wayne Hoban  
Cllr Jayanti Patel  
Cllr Quincy Prescott  
Cllr Liz Santry

### **2.4 Area for Review**

#### Aim

To review the overall content and usability of Haringey Council website and how it can be enhanced to enable elected councillors, members of the public and community partners to successfully interact with the council.

#### Objectives

1. To consider the content and usability of the website and how it might be enhanced;
2. To consider how the website might be developed to enhance local democracy and local democratic services;
3. To consider the content of the Website Development Plan and the Web Application Plan and provide feedback on prioritisation of the planned activity and any omissions from the planned activity.

- 2.5 The key drivers for the development of the website are the council's priorities, the Communications Strategy and Haringey's response to the e-government (IEG) initiative, including the achievement of Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 157

and more recently the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Priority Services Outcomes (PSO) targets. E-government means exploiting the power of information communication technology to help transform the accessibility, quality and cost effectiveness of public services to help revitalise the relationship between customers and citizens and the public bodies who work on their behalf.

- 2.6 BVPI 157 is the basic measurement of electronic enablement of Council services. It encompasses all services offered by a Local Authority and the types of interaction associated with each service, for example: obtaining information, raising a request for a service or paying for a service. A complete list of services to be e-enabled by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005 is given in Appendix 1. The PSOs direct the BVPI 157 target to be delivered in a way that enhances service quality, convenience and availability. It provides clarity for citizens by defining what they can expect to be able to do electronically with their council by 2005. A list of the PSO's is attached in Appendix 2.
- 2.7 The BVPI 157 out-turn performance figures shows that the % of interactions accessible by electronic delivery rising to 70% for 2004/5 and expected to be 75% by end of March 2005. There is a requirement for all local authorities to achieve 100% in this indicator by December 2005. It should be born in mind that these BVPI scores need to be considered in the context of variable definitions of terms, (e.g. what constitutes "accessible") so absolute comparisons over time and with other authorities may not be possible.

	out-turn	local target
2001/2	39%	-
2002/3	45%	-
2003/4	38%*	53%
2004/5	70%	75%
2005 (December)	-	100%

\*Change of calculation methodology

- 2.3 A £3m capital programme is anticipated for investment in corporate IT renewal programmes, including the website and website interface. Part of this will contribute to linking operational departmental IT systems to the website interface to enable greater functionality for online transactions and reduce reliance on traditional methods of customer access and interface (e.g. telephone, letter or in person).
- 2.4 The Government has set out key targets for the development of e-government in local councils and these include enhancement of the content and functionality of websites, as well as enhancing access to local democracy. This Review had taken the Government's agenda for website development and the councils own development strategy as its starting point and focused on ways to enhance the website from the perspective of the service user. This included making sure that appropriate information is available and easily accessible to council customers.
- 2.11 The vision and objectives for the website are based on the framework set out in the council's Information Systems/ Information Technology (IS/IT) Strategy which had been developed within the overall e-government vision, that is "using information

technology to facilitate business transformation and deliver improved services". An improved council website will contribute to this vision by:

- Improving business efficiency by offering alternative ways of accessing information and services;
- Communicating effectively with all customers (including residents, businesses and visitors) and thereby providing improved information about and access to services;
- Enabling service users to undertake a range of both simple and complex transactions.

## **3.0 WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT**

### **3.1 Website Development Plan and Strategy**

- 3.1.1 The Website Development Plan up to March 2006 is given in Appendix 3. It outlines activities to support the enablement of services and creation and update of content, which will continue until March 2006 to achieve e-government targets.
- 3.1.2 The Website Development Strategy sets out the future direction of Haringey council's website. It builds on both the Corporate Communications Strategy and the IS/IT strategy. It also incorporates the key recommendations from the Best Value review of e-government, communications, customer care and complaints undertaken from November 2002 - March 2003.
- 3.1.3 The Website Development Strategy builds on the framework set out in the IS/IT Strategy by setting out a planned, strategic approach to the future development of the website. This Strategy aims to be a roadmap for achieving success, by ensuring all those directly involved have a clear, shared understanding of the website's vision and objectives; a structured workplan and milestones in place to ensure delivery.
- 3.1.4 While the IS/IT Strategy focus on the technological aspects of the website, the Website Development Strategy considers the 'user experience', ie how people can use the website most effectively to access information and services.

### **3.2 Achievements of the Website**

- 3.2.1 The council website had been nominated for the Royal Institute for the Blind award for accessibility. The nomination, in the accessible information category, reflects the work that the authority has done on the site, which has achieved a 'Triple A' rating, the highest award for accessibility and the only borough in London to achieve this standard.
- 3.2.2 In November 2004 the council website had been chosen by the Guild of Accessible Web Designers as its first-ever 'site of the month'. The Guild brings web designers together to focus on ways to ensure that websites reach all sections of the community and are easy to read and navigate by all audiences.

3.2.3 The council's website has also carried off the top prize for accessibility in the 2004 prestigious Clarion Awards, promoted by the International Visual Communications Association, and backed by the Department of Trade and Industry.

### **3.3 Website Objectives**

3.3.1 The objectives set out in the Website Development Strategy is to contribute to delivering the vision of the council's IEG Statement and meet the requirement of council customers and support the council's overall vision and priorities, the website needs to be:

- customer-focused and easy to use;
- fully accessible;
- transactional (to make it easier for customers to do business with the council);
- fully compliant with the electronic Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) and electronic Government Metadata Standards (e-GMS);
- as technically future-proof as is practicable;
- legally compliant.

3.3.2 'Improving business efficiency by offering alternative ways of accessing information and services' is a crucial objective for the website. It is also important that the website is designed as a vehicle for delivering the council's Customer Services Strategy. As such it should as far as possible enable council customers to find information and access council services as favourable alternative to the traditional points of access and as a key mean of user interface.

### **3.4 Promoting the website**

3.4.1 It was noted that the information captured from the online user survey carried out on the website in 2002 showed that:

- 19% found the site by accident;
- 21% visited the site because of a word-of-mouth recommendation;
- 44% of users accessed the site via a search engine.

3.4.2. The fact that 19 per cent of users found the site by accident indicates that more needs to be done to promote awareness and accessibility of the website to Haringey residents. Customers need to be made aware of the increasing benefits in using the site and conducting business with the council online.

3.4.3 At present, the website's address is being included on all publications produced via the Publicity Team including council stationery (letterheads, compliment slips), event materials (exhibition boards, event give-aways such as pens, cups, etc), the front cover and bottom of every page of Haringey People magazine.

3.4.4 In order to increase awareness of the website there is a need to ensure that the website address is included where the Haringey Logo is used e.g. council vans, which travel around the borough and are a great source of mobile advertisements.

3.4.5 It is suggested that the website name be added to council signage. In considering the costs of replacing signs, it is recommended that the Communication Unit

investigate whether high quality, permanent adhesive solutions exist to add to current signs and ensure that all new signs include the website address.

**Recommendation 1**

**That the web site address ([www.haringey.gov.uk](http://www.haringey.gov.uk)) be used on all council communications and advertisements including signage and council vans.**

- 3.4.6 It is also recommended that the council public access computer sites such as library computers be configured to the council homepage. This will ensure residents using council computers are made aware of the website automatically and would encourage greater usage of the website. We heard that that Library Service had initially planned to open all library computers on the council website homepage, but as it takes too long to fire up and users have only half an hour, this was not used.

**Recommendation 2**

**That the Council's public access computer sites, e.g. libraries, should be configured to ensure defaults to Haringey website homepage. This would raise awareness of the website and encourage greater usage.**

### **3.5 Links to External Websites**

- 3.5.1 The Review was informed that the council website only links to government and local strategic partners websites. It is suggested that links to local community/voluntary sector organisations websites be added to the relevant service/ information pages. The Council needs to ensure that residents are able to access information relating to various local services through the website, in particular where the council does not provide the service directly.
- 3.5.2 It was noted that the council was considering including conditions on voluntary organisations funded by the council to provide information on their services to be published on the website. It is suggested that the council write to all voluntary/community organisations to outline the benefits of providing a link or publishing information on the council website.

**Recommendation 3**

**That links to the websites of local community/voluntary sector organisations be added to relevant service/information pages of the website. This should include a disclaimer, as is the current practise about information on other sites**

### **3.6 Website Publishers**

- 3.6.1 The Communication Unit has been designated as the business owner for the strategic development of the council's website. The current arrangement is that staff within directorates publish information relating to their business unit. They are supported by managers who review content to check the information being published is correct.

- 3.6.2 The Education and Social Services directorates have a dedicated officer with the responsibility for publication of content on the website. The visitor numbers given in Appendix 5 show that visits to the web pages of these directorates are significantly higher than other pages of the website and these areas have grown the quickest.
- 3.6.3 A key concern of officers from the other directorates was that as content on the website is increasing it is difficult to manage the publication of materials. It is therefore recommended that the directorates consider allocating responsibility with specific post(s) for management of content development on the web site, or identify additional resources to create a Web Content Management Officer(s) post. There are resource implications attached to these proposals, but as the website is a key communication tool for the council there is a need to ensure it is able to provide accurate information to residents. It is proposed that this officer works closely with the directorates Information Management Officer where there is such a position to ensure they have broad knowledge of activities within the directorate. In cases where there is no such officer the Web Content Management Officer will need to work closely with senior managers to get an overview of services in the directorate.

**Recommendation 4**

**That all the directorates allocate responsibility to specific post(s) for management of content development on the website, or identify additional resources to create a Web Content Management Officer(s) post in their directorate.**

- 3.6.4 Web publishers attend training on the web content management system and are also supported by the Communications Unit. There are various council guides, which include the web editorial and accessibility guidelines and web publishing tool kit to support web publishers. It was noted that the Communications Unit was in the process of organising internal courses on writing for the website.
- 3.6.5 We recommend that web publishers be encouraged to take up training on plain English/ writing for the website, to ensure a consistent standard in writing is maintained throughout the website. Staff need to be supported and feel valued in the role of web publishers, especially if business units are to take a more direct, proactive ownership of the website.

**Recommendation 5**

**That web publishers be encouraged to take up training on the use of plain english/ writing for the website to ensure that a consistent standard in writing is maintained throughout the website.**

### 3.7 Content Development

- 3.7.1 Good practise was noted during the review. In particular the following developments were observed:

Website Content	Website Functionality
Regular message from the Leader	Online library catalogue
Two features on council	Implement Local Government

initiatives/developments (extract from Haringey People)	Category List metadata
Frequently Asked Questions section	What's On events listing database
Better Haringey updates	Improvements to online reporting of abandoned vehicles
New council publications	Improvements to online reporting of defective street lighting
Higher profile of online library catalogue	Improvements to online reporting of highway faults
	Online payments
	Email alert facility on council news

- 3.7.2 It was noted that in the private sector, one of the key objectives of commercial websites is to build online relationships and subsequently customer loyalty to products and services. Key to this is generating repeat visits by users. Although the relationship councils have with their customers is unlike that of the private sector, in that customers cannot choose to use the local authority services of another borough, building an online relationship with service users is still valuable. High quality content is key in creating repeat visits to the site. Innovative transactional applications will attract customers to the site, but good content will keep them on the site for longer and, with useful applications, encourage them to come back.
- 3.7.3 The Web Content Development Plan providing an overview of the main new content to be developed in the short, medium and long term, together with information that needs to be developed to fulfil ODPM e-government requirements is given in Appendix 4. The Plan will need to be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is in line with customers' needs and the council's strategic focus. The provision of pure information/content is an important stage. Information needs to be e-enabled where appropriate via e-forms and this work on content development needs to be dovetailed with the work listed in appendices 1 and 2.
- 3.7.4 Appendix 7 outlines the number of visits to the various pages of the council website for the period of January 2004 to December 2004. It was noted that the number of page views (pages accessed) have steadily increased over this period. With page view doubling since January 2004, from 450, 473 (12 January 2004) to 890,425 (November 2004). This will almost increase considerably when more online services become available over the coming months.
- 3.7.5 The Review considered ways in which the website might be made more appealing to particular groups of people in Haringey. It is suggested to encourage visits by young people and new users the website needs to have a 'fun' element. Development of interactive tours and games will also encourage visitors to stay on the site for longer and come back to the site.

**Recommendation 6**

**That information such as interactive tours/games which are both entertaining and informative/educational be added to the website. For example a virtual tour of Bruce Castle, Alexandra Place or other key sites in the borough.**

3.7.6 The website has details of local service centres such as libraries and one-stop shop. It is suggested a section should be developed on 'Are you new to Haringey' which should include maps and directions to key services such as local schools, hospital, doctors, benefit office and other services which a person who has just recently moved into the area will find useful. We looked at the postcode search system developed by London Borough of Brent and noted that system provides similar facilities, although is not very user friendly.

**Recommendation 7**

**That a section on 'Are you new to Haringey' be developed to include maps and directions on how to get to key service centres such as libraries, one-stop shops, civic centre, hospitals, schools etc. The website should aim to be the portal for Haringey.**

3.7.7 The Review was informed that a key concern of local residents was crime and community safety. Although there is a dedicated website for the Safer Communities Partnership, it is felt that this needed to be incorporated into the council website. The council Web Project Board has been in discussions to amalgamate the material from the external website into the council website. It is suggested that due to the importance of crime and community safety for the local community, a high profile link be added from the homepage of the council website.

**Recommendation 8**

**That the website pages on crime be enhanced to detail news of any particular spate of crime and community safety initiatives. A high profile link from the homepage to the crime page should be added.**

3.7.8 The search function on the website provides a good way for users to find information they want quickly and easily. The search option needs to be easy to use and find the right information required by users. It is recommended that the search engine be adapted to ensure access to council departments pages and key service points be made more accessible by creating direct link through typing appropriate key word, e.g. 'rubbish collection'.

3.7.9 During the Review Members conducted brief tests of the search facility to see how easily it would be to find information on particular services. Comparisons were also made with other council websites. It was found that the Haringey website did not always provide the information expected. For example 'rubbish collection' was entered on the search engine. The search engine found news publication relating to rubbish collection. We also looked at the website of Brent Council and found that the first item their search engine found was the reporting page.

**Recommendation 9**

**That the search engine be adapted so that the most important information is listed first. For instance it should pick up all applications including web pages and attached files, to facilitate easy problem reporting, by creating a direct link by typing the appropriate key word, e.g. 'rubbish collection'.**

3.7.10 We suggest that the new Children Service should be encouraged to make maximum use of the website to strengthen communication with their client groups and to build an integrated service. We also suggest that all new services use the website to build relationships with their client group. This should also enable their client group to access information and services instantly.

**Recommendation 10**

**The new Childrens Service should be encouraged to make maximum use of the website to strengthen communication with their client groups and to build an integrated service.**

### **3.8 School websites**

- 3.8.1 It was noted that every Haringey School has one or more pages incorporated into the council website. Where a school website is known to the council a link has been added on the council website. In order to avoid ‘inappropriate’ materials being published under the banner of Haringey Council, it would be advisable not to relinquish editorial control to non-Haringey staff/agents over any parts of the council website.
- 3.8.2 The London Grid for Learning (LGfL) Broadband Internet contracts with schools include facilities for schools to have their own website hosted within the LGfL Web Portal at no additional cost. This arrangement can be facilitated by council staff, but requires some training and/ or expertise within the school. It is imperative that an organisational structure and mechanism exists within the school to source and maintain information uploaded to their website. The Web Portal provides one common platform for website development, managed e-mail and access to curriculum resources where teachers and students can share the same facilities. The Web Portal allows for the creation of a global website as well as the added functionality to provide each student and teacher with their own personal website space, thus allowing schools to maximise their impact upon teaching and learning.
- 3.8.3 All Haringey schools are already registered with domain names in the format of [www.schoolname.haringey.sch.uk](http://www.schoolname.haringey.sch.uk) via a long-established Department of Education and Skills (DfES) agreement with Nominet (domain name registry company). In addition, schools connected to LGfL are automatically assigned a domain name of [www.schoolname.haringey.lgfl.net](http://www.schoolname.haringey.lgfl.net), which directs website users to the LGfL Web Portal school home page. On request, the council’s Education Department arranges to redirect a school’s DfES/ Nominet domain name to the same location.

**Recommendation 11**

**The LEA should work with governing bodies and headteachers to ensure that one system is used so that all schools are supported to develop a website and secondly that all schools in Haringey follow a standardised web name format as described above.**

## **4.0 LOCAL DEMOCRACY (e-democracy)**

### **4.1 Content Development**

- 4.1.1 The Review noted the recent Scrutiny Review of Youth Democracy, which made several recommendations to increase young people's involvement in the community and democratic process. Their recommendations included involving young people in the consultation process and providing a dedicated website and e-mail facilities to answer young people's queries. We believe that creating a separate website would indirectly isolate young people from the community pages. It is recommended that specific information be developed on the council website for young people.
- 4.1.2 It is suggested that young people be involved in the development of the website pages. It was noted that the Communication Unit was reviewing the materials on young people and older people on the website and propose that they consider our recommendations in their review.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**That a youth 'page' on the council website be developed specifically aimed at young people, to include a 'fun' element (quizzes, links to external websites) and educational content on local democracy and what the council does. In addition, a link should be set to the youth page from the homepage of the website.**

- 4.1.3 It was noted that the current link name to the local democracy pages called 'Council' was based on feedback from user consultation undertaken in October 2003. We believe that to engage residents through the website we need to make sure that visitors are able to navigate easily to the web pages of local democracy. The links to the local democracy pages need to be clear and it was felt the current name does not make this clear. It is therefore, recommended that this link be renamed to 'council and local democracy'.

#### **Recommendation 13**

**That the link to local democracy on the homepage of the website called 'Council' be renamed to 'Council and local democracy'.**

- 4.1.4 The information on councillors on the website is key to engaging residents with their elected representative through the website. The Review recommends that information on councillors be further developed to include membership of internal and external bodies, list by alphabetical order and by political groups. It is also recommended that search facilities to find ward councillors be enhanced to enable residents to find their ward councillor by entering their postcode. These facilities will encourage residents to engage with their elected representative and may also reduce the volume of telephone calls to the Members Services office.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**That a post code search facility be developed to enable the public to identify their ward councillors contact details and to identify their ward and**

**constituency. This should be linked to other relevant sections including the section on 'Are you new to Haringey'.**

**Recommendation 15**

**That the web page providing links to profiles of all elected councillors be displayed to enable searches via the following options:**

- An alphabetical list of all councillors;
- By ward;
- By Executive position;
- By membership of Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- Area Assemblies;
- And by political groups.

**In addition the profiles of individual councillors should be further developed to include easy to view information on position in the council, appointments to outside bodies, ward events, and register of interests. It is noted that the ODPM's Priority Service Outcomes states that councillors are to be given the option of their own web page (appendix 2, R6). This review supports the rollout of this by December 2005. Councillors should be consulted on design, layout and content.**

- 4.1.5 The publication of council meeting agendas on the website is an important way of keeping local residents informed about the democratic process and decisions of the council. It was noted that agenda's for Executive and Planning Sub-Committee are already available on the website.
- 4.1.6 In response to the government's e-democracy PSO targets, it was noted that the council aims to complete this project by December 2005. This review supports completion of these targets as listed in Appendix 2. The initial project will be the procurement of a package to support the management and administration of meetings, decision tracking and the posting of minutes and agendas on the website. The Review noted that the council was in negotiation with a recognised web casting supplier to acquire software to provide live or recorded videos of meetings or presentations via the Internet to the public. Web casting of meetings will provide access to public meetings to a wide range of people, improving transparency and accountability.
- 4.1.7 It is recommended that in implementing the e-democracy target the council needs to ensure that agendas, reports and minutes are published in a clear and accessible form. It is suggested that this should include a list of all council committees with a link to a separate page for each committee with dates of all meetings, which would contain the relevant documentation for the meeting. In particular papers relating to Executive, Overview and Scrutiny, Council, Planning Sub-Committee and Licensing Committee be added.

**Recommendation 16**

**That publication of council agendas, minutes and reports on the website for all public meetings be set out in a clear and accessible form. This should include full council papers, executive papers and agendas and other formally**

**constituted council bodies. For public meetings reports should be published on the website within the legal deadline of publication of council agendas. The council should publish historical reports going back to the establishment of the new constitution following the Local Government Act 2000.**

- 4.1.8 Area Assemblies are key to residents involvement in local decision making and community involvement. It is recommended that the profile and content of Area Assemblies be enhanced to include a separate page for each Area Assembly, with agendas and committee papers, documents relating to the budget of Area Assembly, the facility to enable local residents to suggest an agenda item or ideas on spending the budget, dates of meetings and venues, membership list and contact officer details. The Area Assembly home page should include an introductory statement from the Executive Member for Community Involvement, frequently asked questions (FAQ) (or a link to FAQ page). It is also suggested that the establishment of an online area forum be investigated which will enable people who are not able to attend meetings to comment on local issues that directly affect them. It was noted that the London Borough of Islington had been particularly successful in the implementation of this project.

**Recommendation 17**

**That the profile and contents of Area Assemblies and Housing Forums on the website be enhanced to encourage greater involvement in local decision making.**

- 4.1.9 The council's calendar of meeting incorporating details of all council meetings is currently published on the website. It is recommended that a corporate calendar, which would include all council events from meetings to festivals and openings, be developed. This calendar would have differing levels of access. Access from a London Borough of Haringey computer would allow a view of all scheduled internal and external meetings and events. This would allow better management of diary for both Councillors and officers and keep the public informed of all council events.

**Recommendation 18**

**That following recommendations made in the Scrutiny Review on Decision Making the council should develop an online corporate calendar, which would combine all council events from meetings through to festivals and openings.**

- 4.2 The Review was informed that visitor numbers to the local democracy pages are not recorded at present. We believe that monitoring of this would enable the business unit to target increased use of the website to access local democratic services and improve access to local democracy in Haringey. This will also help to clarify whether we are engaging and informing more people on the council's decision making process through the website.

**Recommendation 19**

**That visitor numbers to the local democracy pages be recorded and monitored to enable the business unit to target increased use of the website to access local democratic services.**

## **5 CONSULTATION & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

5.1 The website has several potential audiences, which includes residents, service users, the local business community, councillors, council staff and partner organisations. One of the challenges of developing the website is to prioritise and balance the needs of these distinct groups. User research is valuable in providing a clear understanding of who is or isn't using the council website site and how customers are using it.

### **5.2 Content Development**

5.2.1 The Review was informed that as part of the e-democracy project the council is planning an 'e-consultation' project, which will enable residents to be involved in consultation processes online. It is suggested that a high profile link to council consultation be introduced to enable residents to have easy access to consultation. The website is currently being used by a large number of people and is expected to double over the coming year as more content is added.

5.2.2 The website is not just a means to inform local residents about council services and news, it is also a vehicle to interactively engage and involve people in the decision making process and in service development. Community consultation in service development in particular can be enhanced by using the website to interact and engage with local residents on how council services should be developed.

#### **Recommendation 20**

**That a high profile link to council consultation be introduced to enable residents to use the website to access all current consultation processes online.**

5.2.3 In line with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Review of the Decision-Making Process, it is suggested that an Annual Consultation Calendar, linked to the Forward Plan, be developed and published on the website. The annual calendar will enable community stakeholders to identify areas of their interest in which they would like to participate.

#### **Recommendation 21**

**That an annual consultation calendar linked to the Forward Plan be published on the website and updated regularly.**

5.2.4 We recognise that not all visitors to the council website will want to read all the information about consultation. It is therefore recommended that an online 'quick vote' system be developed to enable the council to consult residents on simple policy and service related matters. The Review was informed that the software to enable this is available but there is a need to make sure it does not compromise accessibility standards. A 'quick vote' system would allow people to vote for their favoured approach from a defined list of alternatives and provide a snapshot view (not a definitive view) of residents on key areas of council policy and service.

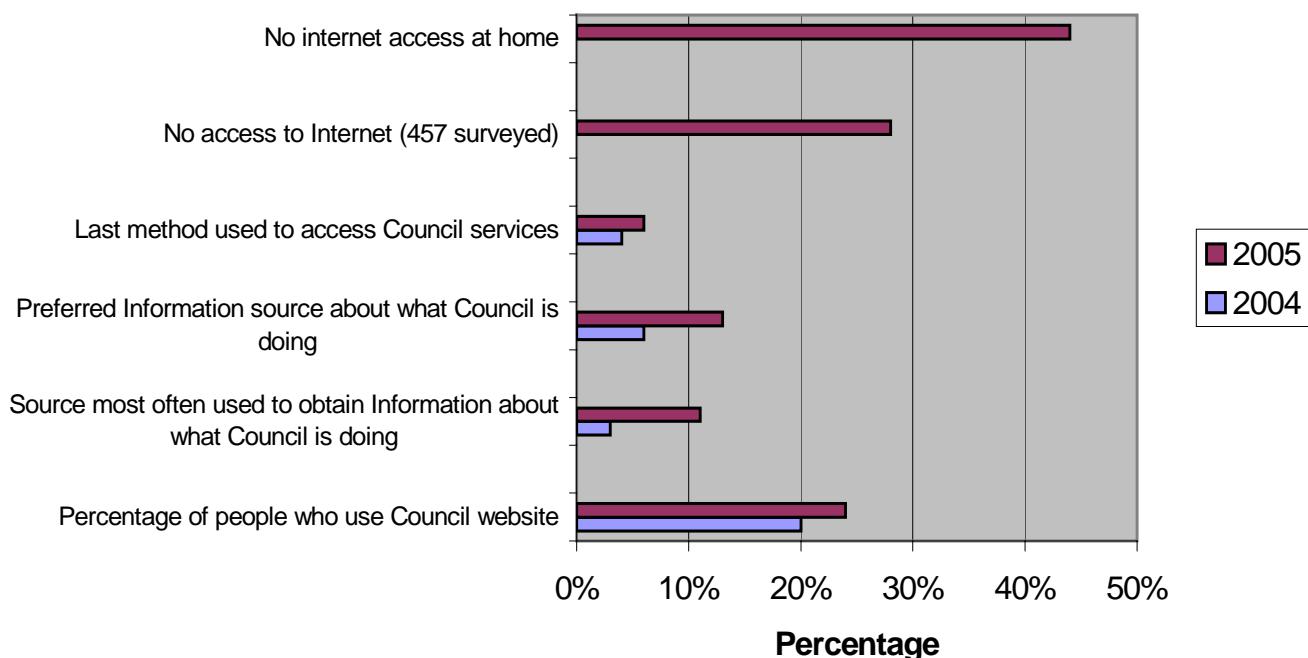
#### **Recommendation 22**

**That a system be developed for quick voting online on topics of interest. A quick vote system will enable the council to consult residents on simple policy and service related matters.**

### 5.3 Website User Research

- 5.3.1 The Communications Audit completed in June 2002 included two website focus group sessions, as well as an online user survey. The feedback from the focus group was used to make improvements to the website. An online website user survey was conducted from July to October 2002. The key findings indicated that the council should focus on:
- ensuring the site is set up to work well with search engines;
  - Improving the breadth and depth of service information;
  - developing content – especially more advisory content.
- 5.3.2. When surveyed on Internet access in Haringey (Haringey Residents Survey 2002/03), the data confirmed a continuous steady increase in the number of residents with Internet access. Access in Haringey was above the national average (59% in 2002/03). Residents indicated they would be interested in using the Internet for:
- studying/learning new skills (52%);
  - finding out about council services (51%);
  - keeping in touch with council developments (45%)
  - communicating with council officers (45%)
  - communicating with elected councillors (40%)
- 5.3.3 The Haringey Annual Residents survey suggested that in 2004 the proportion of people who used the Council website was 20%, this increased to 24% in 2005. The survey also revealed that there had been increase in the number of residents using the website to obtain information. The graph below illustrates the results from the Annual Residents Survey 2003/04 and 2004/05.

**Residents Use of the Council Website**



- 5.3.4 User research is central to the process of developing the website. The structure of the new site should be informed by an understanding of the way in which people want to access information and move around the site. Existing national and London-wide research shows that certain ‘hard to reach’ groups are not generally interested in using the website. The council needs to ensure it provides the information /service these groups require and in a way that they find attractive. In the first instance the council needs to establish to what extent this is true in Haringey.
- 5.3.5 It is recommended that an ongoing online feedback system be developed to continually review the content and structure of the website to identify areas for improvements. This should be developed to regularly test the attraction of the website and to target a high volume of use by local residents. In particular there is a need to ensure that all sections of the community, including hard to reach groups are using the website as alternative point of access. The website should be a key means to overcome barriers to access to service by certain community groups. This can be achieved, for example, by providing translated materials to non English speakers for key services of interest or by engaging young people or even providing services to those people who are not able to access services during council office hours.

**Recommendation 23**

**That an ongoing online feedback system be developed to continually review the content and structure of the website to ensure it remains relevant to local residents needs.**

- 5.3.6 The council’s Communications Unit and Customer Services Department work together to identify customers’ information needs, eg through Frequently Asked Questions. Call Centre staff also undertake telephone surveys on people’s attitudes towards the council website. This Review recommends that focus groups be also set up to undertake full consultation on the development of the website, so that the views and feedback of particular client groups can be determined. The council should look at using existing groups as a starting point in developing focus groups—such as the Phoenix group which offers IT courses for people with disabilities. It was noted that the Communication Unit had developed a questionnaire to seek user views online as well as through ‘Haringey People’ and this was a good way to obtain feedback.

**Recommendation 24**

**That a full consultation on the development of the website be conducted to seek user views on suggestions for improvements. This should seek to capture the views of a wide cross section of the community.**

- 5.4 As part of the consultation on this review a questionnaire (Appendix 5) had been distributed at four Area Assemblies and sent to 100 community organisations to seek their views. Based on this pilot it is recommended that full consultation be carried out later this year.

## **5.5 Customer Services**

- 5.5.1 The Customer Services Department of the council is a key stakeholder in the delivery of an outstanding website, as the site’s underlying purpose is to support the

delivery of services and provide information to the council's stakeholders. The Review was informed that Customer Services have contributed to the development of the site to ensure that the site supports the Access to Services project. In particular, there is a need to ensure that customers' service queries or 'dialogues' made via the site are captured in the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This will require the integration of the CRM and business unit IT systems for the system to be truly interactive and therefore resolving customer request at first point of contact without any manual intervention.

- 5.5.2 The Haringey Residents Survey for 2004/05 shows that accessing services by telephone is still the preferred method among residents (49% of residents surveyed). This obviously has huge implications for the council's Call Centres. Therefore there is a need to ensure that the website is developed to such a standard that increasing numbers of users will be persuaded to access services online.

## **5.6 Haringey Website comparison with top eight London Borough websites**

- 5.6.1 The Society of Information Management Technology Managers (SOCITM) completes an annual survey of all local authorities website. They complete the survey by reviewing local authority websites against criteria of useful content, usability and usage.
- 5.6.2 The Review heard that Haringey website had improved considerably since the SOCITM better connected 2004 survey. The website was comparable to many of the SOCITM top eight London Borough websites. Although there are clearly some areas for improvement (eg depth of content in some service areas, range of online services, etc), the site is heading in the right direction. An explanation of the methodology of the survey and comparison with other websites is given in Appendix 6.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 We concluded that the website had improved significantly over the last year in terms of content, usability and usage. This had been confirmed by the data on visitor numbers to the Council website, which showed that from January 2004 to November 2004 visitor numbers had almost doubled.
- 6.2 We noted the content of the Council's Website Development Plan and Website Application Plan. They outlined various projects, which will ensure the Council meets the BVPI 157 targets and also ensure the Council's customers are able to access various services through the website. We congratulated officers for their hard work, which had led to the Council winning awards for accessibility that included the 2004 Clarion Awards.
- 6.3 During the course of the review various initiatives the review panel had been considering were implemented such as an e-mail alert facility informing customers of updates to information for which they had registered an interest. We also noted that although the website provides easy access to information there are residents

who will still prefer to receive hard copies of documents. This can be due to many reasons such lack of access to Internet.

- 6.4 The recommendations made mainly relate to content development. We felt that improving content will encourage greater use of the website and also engage residents. This review was only able to look at specific parts of the website development due to the short time period over which it was carried out.
- 6.5 We hope the continuous development of the website will provide our residents easy and quick access to information and services they require.